

Guidance and Counselling as a Strategic Tool for the Reintegration of Out-of-School Children into Formal Education in Kano State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The persistent increase in the number of out-of-school children poses a major challenge to achieving inclusive and equitable education in Nigeria, particularly in Kano State, where poverty, school dropout, child labour, socio-cultural practices, and inadequate educational opportunities continue to hinder children's access to formal education. This position paper examines guidance and counselling as a strategic tool for facilitating the sustainable reintegration of out-of-school children into formal education in Kano State, Nigeria. Drawing on contemporary scholarly literature and selected policy documents, the paper discusses the concepts of out-of-school children, formal education, educational reintegration, and guidance and counselling, while highlighting the psychosocial, emotional, behavioural, and academic barriers confronting reintegrated learners. The paper argues that effective reintegration extends beyond school enrolment and requires comprehensive guidance and counselling interventions, including individual counselling, group counselling, family counselling, psychosocial support, peer mentoring, community sensitization, and continuous learner monitoring. It further identifies inadequate funding, shortages of qualified counsellors, weak policy implementation, and socio-cultural barriers as major constraints affecting counselling services in Kano State. The paper concludes that institutionalizing guidance and counselling within educational reintegration programmes will enhance learner retention, school adjustment, educational inclusion, and long-term academic success. It recommends stronger government commitment, stakeholder collaboration, increased investment in counselling services, and continuous professional development for guidance counsellors to promote the sustainable reintegration of out-of-school children into formal education.

Keywords: Guidance and Counselling, Out-of-School Children, Educational Reintegration, Formal Education, Kano State, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human right and a key driver of individual empowerment, social inclusion, and national development. Despite global efforts to achieve equitable access to education, millions of children remain out of school, particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria, due to poverty, child labour, insecurity, displacement, and socio-cultural barriers (UNESCO, 2024; UNICEF, 2023; World Bank, 2024). In Kano State, these challenges have contributed to a high number of out-of-school children and increased school dropout, thereby limiting access to formal education and undermining sustainable development.

Various educational interventions have been introduced to facilitate the reintegration of out-of-school children into

formal education. However, successful reintegration requires more than school enrolment; it also demands adequate psychosocial, emotional, behavioural, and academic support to help learners adjust and remain in school (UNESCO, 2023). Guidance and counselling services play a vital role in addressing these challenges by promoting emotional well-being, improving school adjustment, enhancing learner retention, and strengthening collaboration among schools, families, and communities (Gysbers & Henderson, 2021; Lapan, 2022).

Although several reintegration initiatives exist, limited attention has been given to the strategic role of guidance and counselling in ensuring the successful and sustainable reintegration of out-of-school children, particularly in Kano State.

Against this background, this position paper examines how guidance and counselling can serve as a strategic tool for the reintegration of out-of-school children into formal education in Kano State, Nigeria. It argues that strengthening school-based counselling services and psychosocial support is essential for improving educational inclusion, learner retention, and long-term academic success.

Concept of Out-of-School Children

Out-of-school children refer to children of official school age who are either not enrolled in any formal educational institution or who have withdrawn from school before completing the prescribed level of education. According to UNESCO (2024), out-of-school children include those who have never attended school as well as those who enrolled but subsequently dropped out before completing basic education. Similarly, UNICEF (2023) describes out-of-school children as learners who are excluded from formal education because of economic, social, cultural, geographical, or conflict-related barriers that prevent them from enrolling in or completing their education. From a scholarly perspective, Lewin (2007) viewed out-of-school children as those who are denied continuous participation in formal education due to multiple structural and household factors, while Hunt (2008) argued that the concept encompasses both children who have never attended school and those who discontinue schooling prematurely because of persistent educational and socio-economic constraints. These definitions indicate that the phenomenon extends beyond non-enrolment to include irregular attendance and school dropout.

The problem of out-of-school children remains one of the greatest educational challenges confronting Nigeria. Northern Nigeria accounts for a substantial proportion of the country's out-of-school population, with Kano State being among the states most affected. Factors such as

poverty, child labour, early marriage, the Almajiri system, insecurity, parental illiteracy, inadequate school infrastructure, and cultural practices continue to contribute to educational exclusion. The consequences include increased illiteracy, unemployment, social inequality, juvenile delinquency, and reduced opportunities for national development. These realities underscore the need for sustainable reintegration programmes that address not only access to education but also the emotional, psychological, and social needs of returning learners through effective guidance and counselling services.

Concept of Guidance and Counselling

Guidance and counselling are complementary educational services that assist individuals in understanding themselves, making informed decisions, solving personal and educational problems, and achieving their full potential. According to Shertzer and Stone (1981), guidance is a systematic process of helping individuals understand their abilities, interests, and opportunities in order to make appropriate educational, vocational, and personal decisions. In contrast, counselling is a professional relationship through which trained counsellors help individuals understand and resolve emotional, behavioural, social, and psychological challenges affecting their well-being.

Similarly, Gysbers and Henderson (2021) describe guidance and counselling as an integral component of the school system designed to promote students' academic achievement, career development, personal growth, and social adjustment. Likewise, Lapan (2022) emphasized that comprehensive school counselling programmes improve learner engagement, academic performance, resilience, school retention, and psychosocial well-being, particularly among vulnerable learners.

Within the context of the reintegration of out-of-school children into formal education in Kano State, guidance and

counselling extend beyond academic advice. They provide psychosocial support that helps returning learners overcome trauma, anxiety, fear, low self-esteem, learning gaps, and difficulties in adjusting to the school environment. Guidance counsellors also work closely with parents, teachers, school administrators, community leaders, and development partners to encourage school attendance, improve learner retention, and reduce the likelihood of repeated dropout.

Various counselling services can support the reintegration of out-of-school children, including individual counselling, group counselling, family counselling, peer counselling, career counselling, and referral services. Among these, individual counselling, group counselling, and family counselling are particularly suitable because they address learners' emotional and behavioural needs, strengthen family support, facilitate social adjustment, and promote successful reintegration into formal education. When effectively implemented, these services contribute significantly to educational inclusion, learner retention, and the overall well-being of vulnerable children in Kano State.

Educational Reintegration of Out of School Children in Kano State

Educational reintegration is the process of returning out-of-school children to formal education and providing the academic, psychosocial, and emotional support needed for successful school adjustment. According to UNESCO (2024), reintegration involves restoring children's access to education while addressing barriers that previously prevented their participation. It goes beyond school enrolment by ensuring that learners remain in school and complete their education. In Kano State, successful reintegration requires collaboration among government agencies, schools, guidance counsellors, parents, communities, and development partners. Guidance and counselling play a central role in this process by helping

learners overcome emotional, social, and behavioural challenges, thereby improving school retention and educational inclusion.

Challenges to Effective Guidance and Counselling Services for the Reintegration of Out-of-School Children in Kano State, Nigeria

Despite the recognized importance of guidance and counselling in facilitating the reintegration of out-of-school children into formal education, several challenges continue to hinder the effective delivery of these services in Kano State, Nigeria. One of the major challenges is the shortage of qualified guidance counsellors in public primary and secondary schools. Many schools either lack professionally trained counsellors or assign counselling responsibilities to teachers without specialized training, thereby limiting the provision of effective psychosocial and educational support for reintegrated learners (OECD, 2023).

Another significant challenge is inadequate funding for guidance and counselling programmes. Many schools operate without functional counselling units, appropriate facilities, counselling materials, or sufficient financial resources to implement comprehensive counselling interventions. Consequently, counsellors are often unable to provide individualized counselling, group counselling, career guidance, and follow-up services needed to support the successful adjustment and retention of out-of-school children within the formal education system (World Bank, 2024).

Socio-cultural and economic factors also limit the effectiveness of counselling services in Kano State. Poverty, child labour, early marriage, parental illiteracy, and cultural misconceptions about counselling discourage many families from seeking or accepting professional counselling support. In some communities, counselling is perceived as unnecessary or only relevant for learners with serious behavioural problems, reducing

community participation in school reintegration programmes.

Large student enrolment, inadequate professional development opportunities for counsellors, and weak collaboration among schools, parents, communities, and government agencies further reduce the effectiveness of counselling services. In addition, insufficient integration of guidance and counselling into educational policies and reintegration programmes has resulted in limited institutional support, poor monitoring, and inadequate implementation of learner support services. Addressing these challenges through increased investment, recruitment of qualified counsellors, stakeholder collaboration, continuous professional development, and stronger policy implementation is essential for enhancing the successful reintegration and long-term retention of out-of-school children in formal education in Kano State, Nigeria.

EVIDENCE PRESENTATION

Theme 1: The Magnitude of Out-of-School Children in Kano State, Nigeria

Kano State continues to record one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children in Nigeria due to poverty, school dropout, child labour, early marriage, parental illiteracy, and socio-cultural practices. These factors have deprived many children of access to formal education and increased educational inequality. Studies have shown that returning these children to school requires interventions that go beyond enrolment by addressing the emotional, psychological, social, and academic barriers that contributed to their exclusion (UNESCO, 2024; UNICEF, 2023).

Theme 2: Psychosocial and Educational Challenges Affecting the Reintegration of Out-of-School Children

Out-of-school children often experience emotional trauma, anxiety, low self-

esteem, poor learning readiness, social isolation, and prolonged interruption of schooling. These challenges reduce their confidence, classroom participation, and academic performance after re-enrolment. Unless appropriate psychosocial and counselling support is provided, many reintegrated learners remain vulnerable to absenteeism and repeated school dropout. Guidance and counselling therefore become essential for promoting successful school adjustment and educational continuity.

Theme 3: Guidance and Counselling as a Strategic Tool for the Reintegration of Out-of-School Children into Formal Education in Kano State

Research consistently demonstrates that guidance and counselling play a significant role in facilitating the successful reintegration of vulnerable learners into formal education. Individual counselling enables learners to discuss personal and emotional challenges, while group counselling promotes peer interaction, social adjustment, and confidence building. Family counselling strengthens parental support for children's education, whereas career guidance motivates learners by helping them understand the long-term value of education. These interventions improve school adjustment, learner motivation, and educational participation.

Theme 4: Practical Guidance and Counselling Strategies for the Reintegration of Out-of-School Children

Effective reintegration requires practical and coordinated counselling interventions. Guidance counsellors should begin by identifying out-of-school children through collaboration with schools, communities, religious leaders, and local education authorities. This should be followed by learner needs assessment to determine academic, emotional, behavioural, and social support requirements.

Individual and group counselling sessions should then be organized to address trauma, anxiety, behavioural problems, and low self-esteem. Parents and guardians should receive counselling to encourage regular school attendance and sustained support for children's education. Schools should also establish peer mentoring programmes that enable newly reintegrated learners to receive guidance and encouragement from responsible classmates.

Continuous follow-up counselling, home visits, and collaboration with teachers should be maintained to monitor learners' adjustment, attendance, and academic progress. Referral services should also be provided for learners requiring specialized psychological or social welfare interventions. These strategies can significantly improve learner retention and reduce the likelihood of repeated dropout.

Theme 5: Family and Community Participation in Educational Reintegration

Successful reintegration depends on active collaboration among schools, parents, traditional rulers, religious leaders, community-based organizations, and government agencies. Guidance counsellors should organize community awareness campaigns, parent education programmes, and stakeholder meetings to promote positive attitudes towards formal education. Such collaboration strengthens community ownership of reintegration programmes and creates supportive environments that encourage learners to remain in school.

Theme 6: Challenges Limiting Effective Guidance and Counselling Services for the Reintegration of Out-of-School Children in Kano State

Despite its importance, the implementation of guidance and counselling services in Kano State is constrained by shortages of professionally trained counsellors, inadequate funding, insufficient

counselling facilities, large student populations, weak policy implementation, and limited professional development opportunities.

Socio-cultural misconceptions about counselling, poverty, child labour, and parental resistance further reduce the effectiveness of counselling interventions. Addressing these challenges requires stronger government commitment, increased investment, continuous training of counsellors, and effective collaboration among all stakeholders.

Theme 7: Policy Directions for Strengthening Guidance and Counselling Services in Kano State

Effective reintegration of out-of-school children requires institutionalizing guidance and counselling as an integral component of educational policy in Kano State. Government should recruit qualified guidance counsellors, establish functional counselling units in schools, provide regular professional development programmes, and allocate adequate funding for counselling activities. Educational policies should also strengthen collaboration among schools, families, communities, and development partners to ensure sustainable educational inclusion and learner retention.

DISCUSSION

This paper maintains that guidance and counselling constitute a strategic and indispensable mechanism for facilitating the successful reintegration of out-of-school children into formal education in Kano State, Nigeria. While government and development partners have introduced several initiatives aimed at increasing school enrolment, sustainable reintegration requires comprehensive learner support that addresses the emotional, psychological, social, behavioural, and academic difficulties experienced by returning learners.

The discussion presented in this paper demonstrates that many out-of-school

children face complex psychosocial challenges arising from poverty, school dropout, child labour, family instability, insecurity, and prolonged absence from school. These challenges frequently reduce learners' confidence, academic readiness, and ability to adjust successfully to formal education. Consequently, reintegration programmes that focus exclusively on enrolment without providing adequate counselling support may achieve only short-term success.

The paper argues that guidance and counselling should begin before learners are re-enrolled through community sensitization, learner identification, educational assessment, and parental counselling. During school enrolment, guidance counsellors should conduct orientation programmes, individual counselling, group counselling, and psychosocial support sessions to facilitate school adjustment. After reintegration, continuous monitoring, peer mentoring, academic guidance, family counselling, and periodic follow-up should be implemented to improve learner retention and prevent repeated school dropout.

The paper further contends that successful reintegration cannot be achieved by schools alone. Effective collaboration among the Kano State Ministry of Education, guidance counsellors, teachers, parents, traditional and religious leaders, community organizations, and development partners is essential for creating supportive learning environments that promote educational participation and long-term school retention.

Although several challenges—including shortages of qualified counsellors, inadequate funding, poor counselling facilities, weak policy implementation, and socio-cultural barriers—continue to affect counselling service delivery in Kano State, these challenges can be addressed through increased government investment, continuous professional development for counsellors, strengthened institutional

support, and effective implementation of school-based counselling programmes.

Therefore, this paper concludes that guidance and counselling should be institutionalized as a core component of educational reintegration programmes in Kano State, Nigeria. Through comprehensive psychosocial support, parental involvement, school-community collaboration, continuous learner monitoring, and effective counselling interventions, guidance and counselling can significantly improve educational inclusion, learner retention, and the sustainable reintegration of out-of-school children into formal education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the position advanced in this paper, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Institutionalize Guidance and Counselling in Educational Reintegration Programmes: The Kano State Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and the State Guidance and Counselling Unit, should integrate guidance and counselling services into all programmes designed for the reintegration of out-of-school children. This should begin before learners are enrolled through learner identification, educational assessment, orientation, and counselling, and should continue throughout their schooling to ensure successful adjustment and retention.
2. Recruit, Train, and Support Qualified Guidance Counsellors, The Kano State Government, through the Ministry of Education and Teaching Service Board, should recruit professionally qualified guidance counsellors and deploy them to public primary and secondary schools with high numbers of reintegrated learners. Regular in-service training,

- workshops, and professional development programmes should also be organized to strengthen counsellors' competencies in trauma-informed counselling, psychosocial support, conflict resolution, and learner reintegration.
3. Strengthen School–Family–Community Collaboration; School principals, guidance counsellors, parents, traditional rulers, religious leaders, community-based organizations, and non-governmental organizations should collaborate to identify out-of-school children, encourage school enrolment, and provide continuous support throughout the reintegration process. Regular parent counselling sessions, community sensitization campaigns, home visits, and stakeholder meetings should be organized to reduce school dropout and promote sustained participation in formal education.
 4. Provide Comprehensive Psychosocial and School-Based Counselling Services; Schools should establish functional guidance and counselling units equipped with appropriate facilities and counselling materials to provide individual counselling, group counselling, peer mentoring, academic guidance, family counselling, and referral services. These interventions should be implemented during enrolment and throughout learners' schooling to help reintegrated children overcome emotional, behavioural, and academic challenges, improve school adjustment, and prevent repeated dropout.
 5. Strengthen Policy Implementation, Funding, and Monitoring; The Federal Ministry of Education, Kano State Ministry of Education, SUBEB, and development partners should allocate adequate funding for guidance and counselling services

and establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of reintegration programmes. Periodic supervision, programme evaluation, and policy reviews should be conducted to ensure that guidance and counselling remain integral components of educational inclusion strategies and contribute to improved learner retention and successful reintegration into formal education in Kano State, Nigeria.

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